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## Towards a Computational Analysis of Style in Architectural Design

Content Areas: Qualitative encoding, information theory, agents, social networks.

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### Abstract

This paper proposes a computational model of design that attempts to capture within a social context two important aspects of style: 'content' and 'manner'. We present a characterisation of style for the artefact based on a framework that consists of information theoretic measures. We discuss the benefits the study of social networks offers a computational analysis of both aspects of style. It is our aim to bring style as 'content' and style as 'manner' together using this approach.

### 1. Introduction

Research in various domains share problems of formalizing style. In this paper we describe a schema for the computational analysis of design style. We utilize both form and social determinants as two fundamental dimensions in design. An appropriate conception of design has been presented as a purposeful, constrained, decision-making, exploration and learning activity [Gero, 1996]. The designer operates within a context, which changes as they explore emerging relationships between designs, their style and the context itself. Style is influential in changing the design context as it enables the designer to extend design knowledge by grouping or classifying existing design artefacts according to some distinguishable properties. The context or the situation is influential in transformation processes that may occur incrementally through acts of imitation or radically through acts of innovation. In this way style acts as an ordering principle in design that allows individual artefacts and processes to be structured, providing order within an otherwise apparently chaotic domain.

Generally, style considers both the 'manner' in which something is done and the 'content' of what is being accomplished [Simon, 1975]. Our analysis of style does not isolate 'manner' from 'content'. Instead we approach style primarily from the viewpoint of design 'content' in order to explore possible processes of action of the indi-

vidual and interaction with the situation, which may be inferred from the artefact. Since style is a concept based on general agreements of the commonalities, in a design society, it is necessary to consider social relations, that is, the agreements of the individual, school, society or culture. Such an approach to style may in turn reflect potential relations within the design process that transform design requirements into design properties. A computational analysis of style should therefore bring both representation of artefacts and the processes of interaction together.

The problem we are considering in this paper concerns the social dimension of design artefacts and processes construed in terms their stylistic transformations. The domain of this study is the two-dimensional drawing and related activity. The subject of this study is the social aspect of design style and the effects of style knowledge on its transformation. In analyzing style as artefact and as process we consider the social context that extends from the agent into the situation. This approach considers the interactions between the agent, the product, and the socio-cultural context. However, a definition of design style emerging as a social construct negotiated among a number of social agents is a nascent approach. Such a method seeks to understand the influence of social phenomenon in terms of the individual actions and interactions.

### 1.1 Style and the Social Context

Style operates socially in a number of ways. First, the style of an artefact embodies notions of identity that are socially recognized and thus become instances in the symbolic exchange of meaning [Goodman, 1976]. Second, style becomes an influence for individual and collective action [Shapiro, 1961]. Third, styles influence their own transmission and transformation [Knight, 1994]. Style is inclusive of such social relations relative to the individual artefact that address the situation in which designers and design communities function.

One difference between the design artefact and the design process is the level of subjectivity in their social construction. The artefact undergoes an evaluation at

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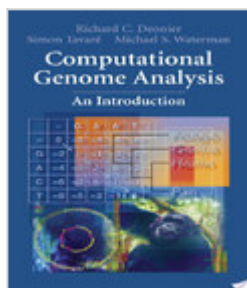
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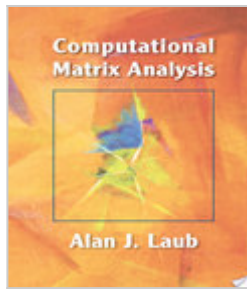


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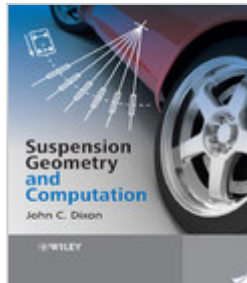
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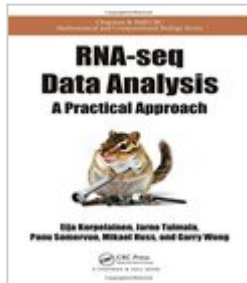
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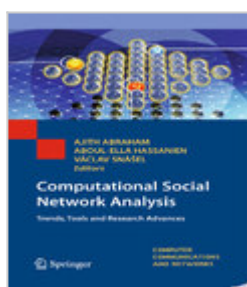
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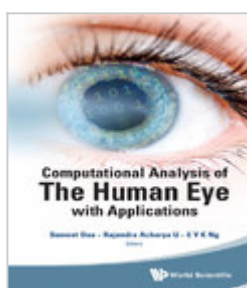
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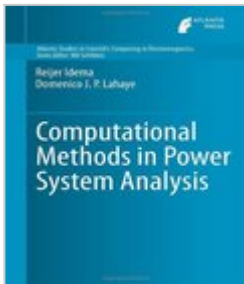
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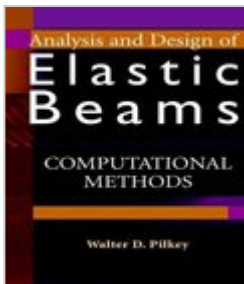
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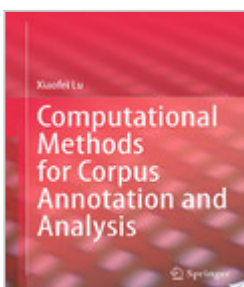
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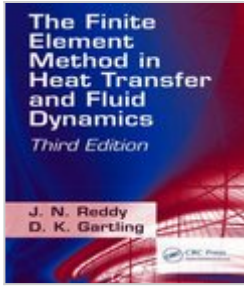
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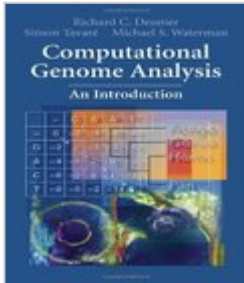


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